

The President's Daily Brief

22 February 1971

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Weekend developments associated with the South Vietnamese cross-border operation into Laos are summarized on *Page 1*.

The military situation in northern Laos is discussed on *Page 2*.

North Vietnam's top leaders have become personally involved in fresh efforts to mobilize more men for military duty. (*Page 3*)

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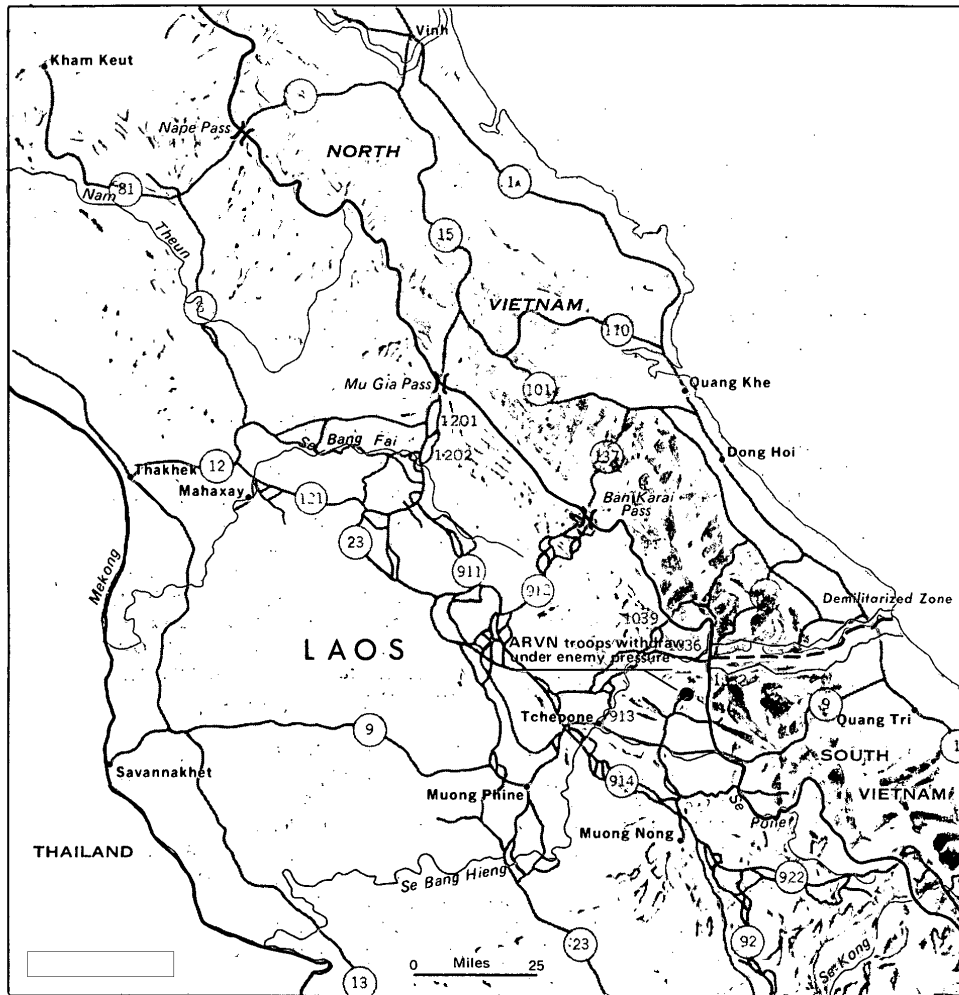
The status of Soviet ships in the Caribbean is noted on *Page 6*.

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VIETNAM-LAOS

Sustained Communist pressure over several days has forced a South Vietnamese battalion to withdraw from a position in the mountainous terrain north of Route 9 between Tchepone and the South Vietnamese border. Precise casualty figures from this action are not yet available, but US aerial observers estimate that the North Vietnamese lost more than 600 troops killed.

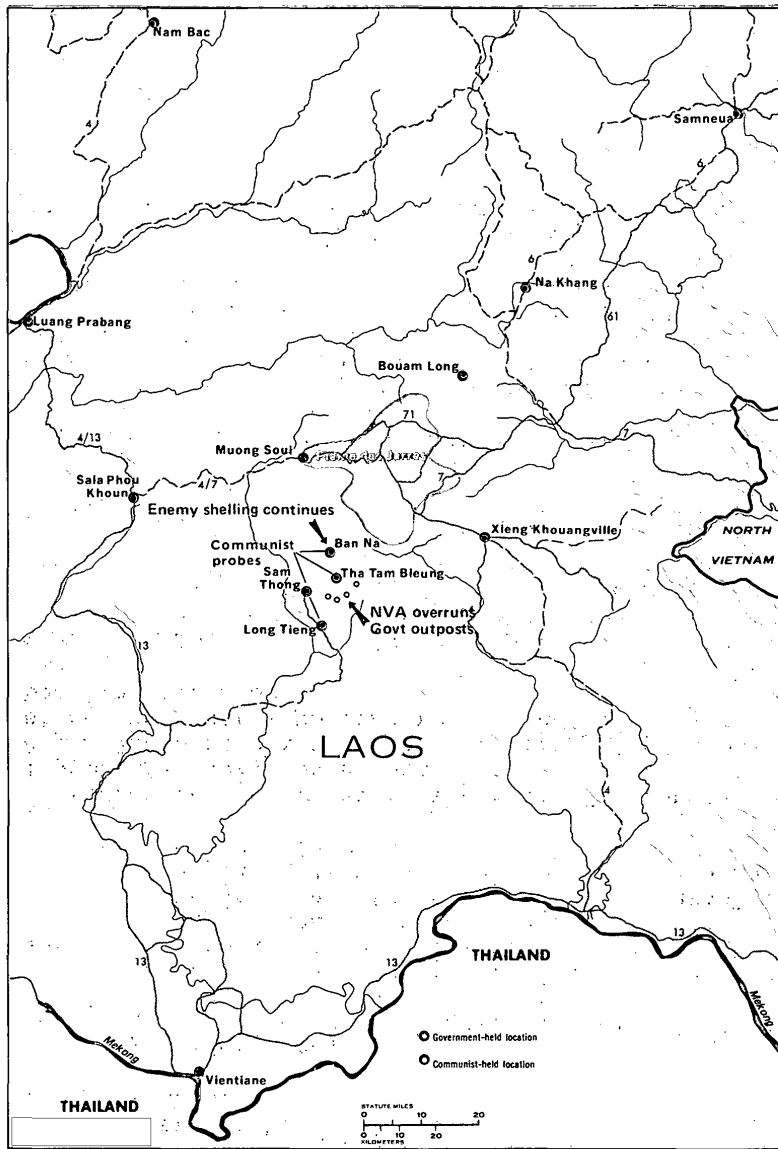
Several regiments from North Vietnam recently have reinforced the enemy in this area and the Communists apparently intend to challenge the right flank of the South Vietnamese drive toward Tchepone. Over the weekend there were signs [redacted] that elements of yet another regiment from the 308th Division may have arrived in this area.

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Southeast of Tchepone the North Vietnamese launched a sharp ground attack on 20 February against South Vietnamese forces who are attempting to obstruct the most important routes in the enemy's Laotian road system.

The North Vietnamese appear to be moving a forward command post from the 324B Division into this area to oversee the operations of three recently arrived regiments, and the enemy is likely to intensify its efforts to protect this road network.

Intercepted messages from North Vietnamese logistics units covering the period through 19 February indicate that supplies were still moving through the area adjacent to Tchepone, but that some difficulties were beginning to develop farther to the southeast along the key Route 914-92-922 complex. One message said that North Vietnamese units near the town of Muong Nong had not received needed supplies and anticipated a difficult time dealing with the "enemy" if the shipment did not arrive.



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LAOS

The Communists continued to nibble away over the weekend at government strong-points commanding the approaches to Long Tieng.

North Vietnamese forces have overrun four Lao irregular outposts in the vicinity of Tha Tam Bleung. The outposts were garrisoned by elements of two guerrilla battalions which withdrew to the southwest after sustaining casualties of eight killed and 25 wounded. The irregular base at Tha Tam Bleung itself was subjected to enemy ground probes.

Ban Na, under strong pressure from elements of the North Vietnamese 312th Division, was shelled on at least a dozen occasions during the weekend. Small-scale ground clashes occurred around its defensive perimeter as well as around the nearby base at Sam Thong. Despite the intensity of enemy shelling, the airstrip at Ban Na has been reopened, and medical evacuation and resupply missions are once again under way.

Near Long Tieng, government irregulars have beaten back several small-scale ground probes against outposts within a mile of Vang Pao's headquarters. Intercepts indicate, however, that some elements of the major Communist units threatening Long Tieng--the NVA 316th Division and NVA 866th Independent Regiment--edged closer to the base during the weekend. Early this morning in Long Tieng, a light rocket attack cut main power lines causing a temporary blackout.

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NORTH VIETNAM

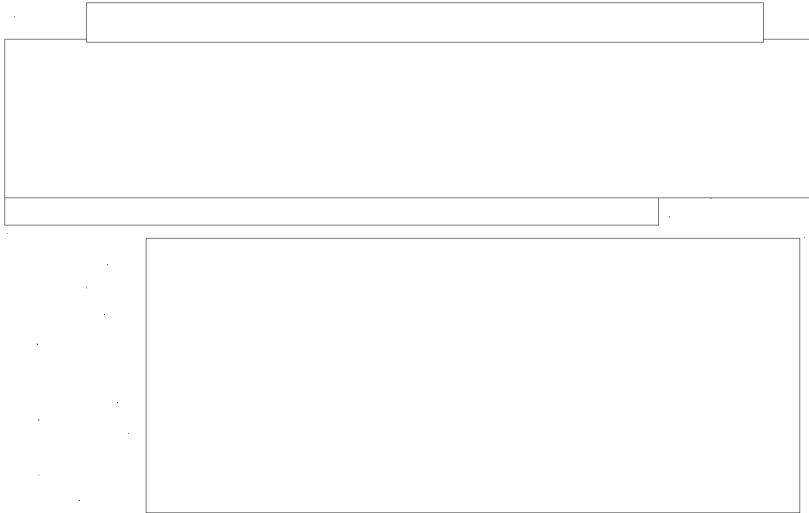
The Communist Party central committee has convened a conference to review the regime's efforts to mobilize more women for tasks on the home front. A Radio Hanoi announcement of 18 February left a clear impression that the mobilization is designed to free more men for military duty. Party head Le Duan and Premier Pham Van Dong addressed the meeting.

Gatherings of this kind aimed at mobilizing the North Vietnamese masses for one purpose or another are standard fare, but this one seems more than an ordinary meeting. The central committee does not usually sponsor run-of-the-mill conferences, nor do Hanoi's top leaders, particularly Le Duan, normally show up at routine affairs. Moreover, this high-level, public meeting on manpower occurred shortly after the beginning of the Laotian operation and only a few weeks after a central committee plenum that almost certainly weighed the possibility of such an allied move.

An accelerated recruitment and conscription drive has been under way in North Vietnam for several months. This meeting may signal a period of even more intense manpower mobilization for the front lines and for the home guard.

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CHINA



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NOTES

USSR-Cuba: The Soviet Kresta-class guided-missile cruiser and the tanker Liepaya arrived yesterday in the port of Cienfuegos. The cruiser had been operating in the Gulf of Mexico since leaving Havana on 15 February. U-2 photography [redacted] shows the Soviet submarine tender and the N-class nuclear-powered attack submarine still moored in the naval basin near Cayo Alcatraz in Cienfuegos Bay. The two nuclear submarine support barges are still tied up at the Cuban naval base at Cienfuegos.

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Burma: [redacted]

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